



Georgia Initiative for Community Housing



Year Eight Progress Report - 2012

Executive Summary

With the ongoing support of the Georgia Power Company as Founding Sponsor, the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) has facilitated progress toward housing stability in 41 Georgia communities during its first seven years. In 2012, the sixth class of communities: Americus/Sumter County, Covington, Gray/Jones County, Thomson/McDuffie County, and Winder successfully completed the program, becoming GICH alumni.



In 2012, the freshman, sophomore and junior classes of GICH continued working to revitalize declining neighborhoods, create new affordable housing options, and provide financial and home buyer education to their residents. GICH provides a platform for teams to think of creative solutions and network ideas with housing professionals, city officials and staff, as well as community volunteers from across the state. Housing teams continued to make steady progress toward building the framework and relationships on which long term housing and community programs will be built.

The direct support of the GICH partners – the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA), the University of Georgia (UGA) Housing and Demographics Research Center, and the UGA Office of the Vice President of Public Service and Outreach – included ongoing technical assistance, as well as the organization and sponsorship of retreats for the participating communities. In 2012, these retreats were hosted by Tifton and Cartersville, where more than 150 community housing team members came together for facilitated work sessions, targeted assistance, networking and training by housing experts. Many of the initiatives implemented in the individual communities were a direct result of information shared at the GICH retreats. Additional in-kind support was provided by Georgia EMC, the UGA Archway Partnership, and the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

GICH communities are gaining a better understanding of their local housing needs, learning about housing and community development tools, and acquiring valuable information on available funding sources to assist them with addressing those needs. As evidenced by their accomplishments in this report, they are steadily enhancing their knowledge and effectiveness in addressing the issues in their communities. Even in the challenging housing market of 2012, communities were still able to move forward on plans to revitalize their neighborhoods by removing abandoned and dilapidated houses, obtaining grants for rehabilitation, and providing down payment assistance and counseling. (See following page). Many GICH communities formed significant new partnerships, created urban redevelopment agencies and amended current ordinances in support of their objectives.

Since many housing challenges require more than three years to address, GICH is committed to providing ongoing technical assistance with implementing local housing plans. In 2012, the program partners held alumni meetings and networking opportunities at both retreats, where participants learned about best practices for building community support, an update on the Georgia Land Bank Authority law, and issues related to rental housing development. In addition a database of GICH housing activities and best practices was created and is available to the public. The GICH networking listserv now has more than 649 subscribers.

GICH by the Numbers

Funds - Number of Communities: 4

CDBG and CHIP funds received or utilized in 2012- \$2,051,581
Other – \$20,324 (Housing counseling)

Number of Units - Number of Communities: 7

Constructed (or under construction) – 40
LIHTCs awarded or approved in 2012 – 286
Rehabilitated – 27
Removed abandoned or dilapidated – 84
Conducted (completed or working) housing assessments – 6

Housing Counseling, Down Payment Assistance - Number of Communities: 8

Down Payment Assistance – 6 households
Housing Counseling – 461 clients

New Activities – Number of Communities: 12

Code or ordinances implemented or updated

Americus– Revised 5 codes

Wadley – All codes were updated

Warner Robins – Revising zoning regulations (include mixed-use district, Group Homes, Transitional Housing, and Personal Care Homes)

Washington – Amended Subdivision Ordinance

Winder - Sign ordinance

Positions created or filled

Gainesville – Housing Coordinator

Harlem – Community Development Director

Nashville – Better Hometown/Economic Development Manager & City Marshall

Thomson/McDuffie County– City Code Enforcement Officer

Wadley – Code Enforcement Officer (announced)

Warner Robins – Administrative Assistant (serves GICH team)

New agencies/organizations/authorities created

Americus/Sumter County – Urban Redevelopment Agency

Covington – CRUSH (Covington Resources Undertaking Safer Housing)

Thomson/McDuffie County – Urban Redevelopment Advisory Committee (GICH team members)

Washington – Housing Counseling Program joined the newly formed Region 7 Collaborative

New partnerships formed

Garden City with Rebuilding Together Savannah

Gray/Jones County with Mustard Seeds Ministries and Wayne Jackson of Dames Ferry Properties

Harlem with Fort Gordon

Sylvania with Downtown Development Authority, Board of Commissioners, Habitat for Humanity, BB&T, USDA, Waynesboro Housing Authority and local businesses

Wadley with Republic Sanitation, Georgia Conference of Black Mayors, Jefferson County Development Authority, Development Authority of the City of Wadley, Norfolk Southern Railway, U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and Wadley City Officials

Warner Robins with New Hope International

Washington with Regions Bank and Queensboro Bank

Gainesville

As a newly inducted GICH participant, the City of Gainesville team focused its efforts on revitalization and providing financial and home buyer education to its residents, while continuing its program of rehabilitation and demolition. Selected activities include:

- Adopted the Gainesville 2030 Comprehensive Plan as a tool to help guide development of quality, affordable housing.
- Participated in a City Housing Task Force with the Gainesville Public Housing Authority and others.
- Planned a Housing Summit for February 2013 to help educate citizens on all aspects of housing including owning, renting, and maintenance.



Gainesville Housing Summit

- Researched the possibility of forming a land bank after visiting the City of Macon and learning about their housing initiatives.
- Awarded a \$306,000 CHIP grant to implement a homeowner rehabilitation and down payment assistance program and submitted the annual application for CDBG entitlement funds (\$380,250).
- Opened an urban greenway, which runs through the Midtown Redevelopment Area, a blighted area in the historic heart of Gainesville.
- Contracted with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government to develop area-specific redevelopment concepts and compatible infill designs for 3 areas of deteriorating housing stock: a portion of the Midtown Redevelopment Area, the Newtown neighborhood, and an in-town historic neighborhood.
- Contracted with the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission to conduct a city-wide housing survey and conditions assessment.
- Built 2 Habitat houses.
- Approved Low-income Housing Tax Credits application for Myrtle Terraces at New Holland will be developed near the Northeast Georgia Medical Center and include 84-units of affordable, independent senior living.

Garden City

The Garden City Community Housing Team's goal is to revitalize, rejuvenate, and restore housing in the City. The primary focus in the first year was to identify partnership opportunities and housing needs, while communicating with the public. Selected activities include:

- Developed a comprehensive list of community resources to assist with future projects. Began outreach to representatives of these local organizations.
- Initiated marketing efforts to enhance communication of team goals. Activities included

a presentation to City Council, a feature on the local news, production of a logo, development of a webpage, and the creation of tee-shirts.

- Conducted a volunteer led campaign to assess housing conditions within the community. Resident volunteers used the opportunity to enhance visibility of their GICH initiative by wearing vibrant green tee-shirts featuring their GICH team logo. Questionnaires have been completed for three of the five City districts. The City is maintaining a GIS database of each structure identified on the survey.
- Supported the City Council's reservation of funds for improvements to a City-owned community center in one of the surveyed neighborhoods. This project is a potential catalyst that will ignite neighborhood pride. Council has also approved funds for the demolition of 4 dilapidated structures in the City.



Garden City GICH Team logo

Harlem

The mission of the Harlem GICH team is to plan and shape the community's future by preserving the City's character; creating opportunities for a range of quality housing options; and prospering by managing the City's growth and development. An important goal is to control their destiny.

Selected activities include:

- Started a housing inventory and invited Grovetown to give a presentation about their Urban Redevelopment Plan.
- Increased code enforcement resulted in several overgrown yards and lots to be cleared.
- Coordinated a visit to Athens-Clarke County, where Mayor and Council toured successful redevelopment initiatives in the City.
- Worked to leverage existing public housing by developing a Housing Authority Consortia Strategic Plan, partnering with a developer to submit an application for tax credits, and planning for demolition and reconstruction.
- Advocated keeping schools in the City and the redevelopment of the existing sites. Met with Board of Education representatives to discuss the future of Harlem schools. City staff attended a school siting workshop. Drafted a connectivity plan to include Safe Routes to Schools and a Walk to School Day. Invited a Georgia Conservancy representative to give a presentation on siting.
- Cultivated the relationship with Fort Gordon. Invited a representative to join the housing team, and the City is working to increase attendance at events on base.
- Recruited new housing team members, which included the City's new Community Development Coordinator and representatives from the faith-based community. Participated in event with



Harlem housing

local pastors to inform them about GICH activities and invited them to participate in the GICH program.

- Made presentation at City Council meeting about GICH activities. Also discussed the possibility of using the following tools: the Blight Tax Ordinance, the International Property Maintenance Code, and the Foreclosure Registry.

Wadley

The Wadley GICH Team's focus is to provide assistance to families and individuals with housing and economic needs and to develop and beautify the City. The target areas include: North and South Main Streets and Butts Street. Selected activities include:

- Held a meeting to inform the community about the GICH Team's initiatives. Attendance was better than expected, and several citizens signed up to volunteer.
- Conducted a Housing Fair with more than 70 in attendance including representatives from EOA, USDA, DCA and the Veteran Program attended. The purpose of the fair was to inform citizens of available housing opportunities and to get input on community needs. Feedback identified through a survey revealed the greatest needs to be information and resources to purchase a home and to make home repairs.
- Hosted a business luncheon with 36 persons in attendance representing ten local businesses. Attendees completed a survey, and business owners were impressed with the goals and progress of the GICH Team.
- Made announcements about all events through local media, handing out flyers, putting up posters and signs, sending letters to churches, and posting flyers in stores, city hall and the library. Signs and flyers were printed in Spanish too.
- Attended CHIP and CDBG workshops and submitted a CHIP grant to rehabilitate 7 homes.
- Amended and updated all City codes and a position for a certified Code Enforcement Officer was announced.
- Formed new partnerships with the Republic Sanitation Company, the Georgia Conference of Black Mayors, the Jefferson County Developmental Authority, the Development Authority of the City of Wadley, the Norfolk Southern Railway, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, and Wadley City Officials.
- Continued work on a new city hall, streetscape on Main and Butts Streets, water and sewage infrastructure in the city, the removal of a dilapidated commercial building, and GDOT GATEway Grant activities.



Wadley GICH Team community meeting

Warner Robins

The Warner Robins GICH Team is focused on increasing community involvement, building partnerships, improving infrastructure, enforcing codes, and removing vacant and dilapidated structures. Selected activities include:

- Conducted a neighborhood cleanup of areas targeted for neighborhood revitalization: Camellia Circle/Sewell Circle and Wellston Villas. The team developed relationships with residents to discuss litter, waste collection services and neighborhood improvements. With help from Keep Warner Robins Beautiful, more than 150 letters were mailed, seeking input from area residents. In response, 3 piles of debris on right-of-ways were removed, 2 yards were cleared of junk and yard waste, 3 street lights were repaired, and 2 road signs were replaced.
- Re-established a partnership with New Hope International Church to “adopt” Camellia/Sewell Circles. The church congregants committed to establish better communication between the church and residents, to provide monthly neighborhood and park cleanups, and offer yard cleanups and/or mowing services.
- With the City’s Code Enforcement Department, removed a dilapidated house, and cleared 3 additional lots of dumped building materials.
- Partnered with the Middle Georgia Regional Commission to conduct a Housing Assessment Survey for the Camellia Circle area.
- Initiated steps by the City of Warner Robins and the Warner Robins/Houston County Housing Authority to create a Land Bank Authority.
- The GICH work plan and activities were communicated broadly through presentations made to the Mayor, City Council, and the Redevelopment Authority. Also, submitted a news release to the local media and planned interviews and speaking engagements.
- Assisted 70 families through housing counseling classes and built one house through Habitat for Humanity.
- Rehabilitated 18 single-family dwellings with the City’s CDBG funds.
- Began updating the city’s Zoning Regulations to include a mixed-use district, Group Homes, Transitional Housing, and Personal Care Homes.
- Created a position and hired an Administrative Secretary to assist the Redevelopment Authority and Community Development Department. This person attends all GICH Retreats, Steering Committee and GICH monthly meetings and takes minutes.



Neighborhood cleanup

Auburn

The Auburn GICH team's focus is to provide high quality, multi-family housing options to the community and to enforce existing codes and ordinances. Selected activities included:

- Supported a developer's submission of a Low-income Housing Tax Credit application for Auburn Hills, a property of 72 apartment units.
- Launched a public transit system called A.N.T. (Auburn Neighborhood Transit).

Since June, ridership has increased slowly. Fare is \$1 and stops include all major commercial areas. A.N.T operates on weekdays 8am-5pm and was an integral part of the tax credit application.

- Implemented a code enforcement program to address dilapidated buildings. This includes systematically inspecting houses via a geographic grid. One dilapidated house is pending removal.
- Partnered with the NE Georgia Regional Commission and developed a questionnaire to be used for a senior housing assessment. The survey was piloted with the Auburn OWLS (Older Wiser Laughing Seniors), a local senior citizens association.



Brush removed, Auburn clean up in process

Eatonton

The Eatonton GICH Team's main goal is to clean up slum and blighted areas within the city and to attract private development. Two significant pieces of the work plan are to update all codes and ordinances and to conduct a housing assessment. Selected activities include:

- Improved slum and blight conditions. With the continued work of the Code Enforcement Officer and the support of City Council, more than 20 locations were cleaned up.

These efforts have made a big impact in two areas: Hearn Apartments and Aluminum Mill Hill, where housing prices are stabilizing, neighborhood morale is increasing and crime is decreasing.



A neighborhood where cleanup occurred

- Contracted with the Regional Commission to complete a Housing Assessment. A map of housing conditions is available online and will be utilized to prioritize areas of work.
- Held a Housing Workshop to educate the public about available housing assistance for purchasing, renting, refinancing, and foreclosure prevention.
- Provided housing counseling classes to 75 individuals, removed 22 abandoned or dilapidated houses, and Habitat for Humanity local chapter built 2 homes.

Nashville

The Nashville GICH team continues to address the lack of decent, safe affordable housing by focusing on three goals: assess the housing needs within the community, promote homeownership through education and enforce local codes and ordinances. Selected activities include:

- Filled two community development related positions in the City: Better Hometown/Economic Development Manager and a City Marshal.
- Increased code enforcement efforts, particularly in the 2 target areas: Beetree and Ann Streets.
- Cleaned lots and removed dilapidated trailers and houses leading to new lots for sale. Contacted property owners and have had several voluntary condemnations.
- Obtained a park improvement grant for the Beetree neighborhood. Community input meeting is scheduled with residents and architect.
- Researching potential redevelopment opportunities for 18 vacant duplexes in the Beetree area. Local realtors are working to identify prospective buyers.



Dilapidated trailer removed in Nashville

Sylvania

The City of Sylvania GICH team did not participate in the 2012 retreats due to budget constraints, loss of personnel and change in leadership. Partnerships are being established, and a local developer is still making progress on the redevelopment of an old school. Selected activities include:

- Redeveloped the front part of the main school building into an adult daycare and activity center. The classrooms have been redeveloped into senior apartments, the school gymnasium has been repurposed as a church, and the nursery building will house the Head Start School.
- Made exterior improvements to Housing Authority units, including roof replacements, vinyl siding installation, and a new security fence.
- Established partnerships with the Downtown Development Authority, Chamber of Commerce, Board of Commissioners, local business owners, Habitat for Humanity, the Waynesboro Housing Authority, and local media outlets.
- Worked with BB&T to offer credit counseling and with USDA to provide pre-qualifications for home loans.

Washington

The City of Washington's GICH team focused on addressing substandard housing and improving housing conditions in the City. The team formed new partnerships and developed new programs, while continuing work on existing initiatives. Selected activities include:

- Working with the local Code Enforcement Officer, identified 35 substandard properties/lots. The goal is to develop affordable homes for first-time low- to moderate-income families or individuals to purchase.
- Began to develop a Hands-on Washington program to assist low-income, disabled, or senior homeowners in need of emergency repairs. Residents will provide volunteer and professional services.
- Marketed the purpose and mission of the GICH Team and added several new team members to the roster.
- Partnered with a developer and was awarded Low-Income Housing Tax Credits for the development of 60 affordable housing units for individuals 55 years and older.
- Took a guided tour in Macon to learn about their community development initiatives, including innovative techniques such as mixed-use development and bond financing.
- Provided housing counseling services to 152 individuals, and joined the Region 7 newly established Housing Counseling Collaborative led by DCA to provide a continuum of housing related services.
- Provided down payment assistance to 3 families and submitted a CHIP application for Down Payment Assistance for up to 25 families.
- Established partnerships with two banks that are participating lenders for the Georgia Dream Program: Regions Bank and Queensboro Bank.
- Completed 2 major rehabilitation projects, including 1 reconstruction. CHIP funds were also used for relocation, demolition and asbestos removal. Removed 10 abandoned or dilapidated houses.



City of Washington GICH team

Americus/Sumter County

With assistance from the Sumter County Archway Partnership, the Americus/Sumter GICH Team continues to develop useful tools for housing revitalization and community development. Selected activities include:

- Facilitated 5 community input meetings regarding the drafted Urban Redevelopment Plan (URP), which includes 5 target areas and addresses historic, abandoned and dilapidated structures, as well as infrastructure needs.
- Partnered with City of Americus Departments: Finance, Building Inspections and Permits, Police, Community & Economic Development, Fire, Natural Gas, Public Works, and GIS. Collaborated with the River



GICH Team community meeting

- Valley Regional Commission, the Housing and Demographics Research Center, and the College of Environment and Design at UGA on various aspects of the URP.
- Provided weatherization services to several houses through the Fuller Center for Housing.
- Two active GICH team members were appointed to the Americus/Sumter Housing Authority Board.
- Supported a developer's Low-income Housing Tax Credits application which was awarded for Creekview Commons: 50 affordable apartments for seniors. Also, submitted applications for CDBG and CHIP.
- Demolished 5 dilapidated housing structures; rehabilitated 6 homes; built 5 Habitat for Humanity homes; and provided 50 individuals with housing counseling classes.

Covington

The Covington Housing Team and the Covington Redevelopment Authority continue to focus on the redevelopment of the Walker's Bend neighborhood through partnerships with LIHTC developers, the Covington Housing Authority, ViewPoint Health Services and local private builders. Walker's Bend is a mixed-use, mixed-income Earth Craft community located less than 2 miles from downtown. Selected activities include:

- Continued support of the Financial Freedom Household Finance and Homeownership Counseling program. More than 60 participants have graduated, resulting in five home purchases. The program is in partnership with the Covington Housing Authority and many participants are housing authority residents.
- Completed the first project in the redevelopment of Walker's Bend neighborhood: The Village at Walker's Bend. The 32 single-family homes for rent were developed using LIHTCs.

- Submitted submission of a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit application for 60 apartment units for seniors in Walker's Bend. This application was in addition to Harristown Park: 60, senior apartment units developed in 2011 with LIHTCs.
- Other projects in progress: The New Leaf Center, a mixed-use development with 32 one-bedroom apartments and a job training center, and the Clover Bridge Permanent Supportive Housing facility.
- Created CRUSH: Covington Resources Undertaking Safer Housing, a partnership between Covington Public Safety, Public Works and Code Enforcement employees. All agencies use a single software program to report and update code violations or unsafe housing conditions.
- Built 1 Habitat house using NSP funds and removed 32 abandoned or dilapidated houses.



Covington redevelopment

Gray/Jones County

The Gray/Jones GICH team continued working to provide affordable housing options for their residents and reapplied for CDBG grant funds. Team members spent time fortifying old partnerships and seeking new ones. Selected activities include:

- Redefined the target area for the CDBG application. With guidance from the Middle Georgia Region Commission, the City applied and was awarded a \$385,531 CDBG grant for revitalization of the Jefferson St area.
- With Jones Area Council on Relief, offered 7 financial literacy workshops conducted by the Consumer Credit Counseling Services of Macon.
- In partnership with Mustard Seed Ministries, re-roofed 9 houses and built 4 ramps. Homeowners with the greatest need were served first, and fund raisers were held to offset expenses. Personal donations were collected and mini grants were obtained from the Tri-County Electric Company. Materials and labor were donated.
- Educated the community on how to report code violations.
- Supported work on the Haddock area redevelopment. This includes plans to repurpose the Idella Duncan Elementary School into a Community Health Center.
- Recruited a developer to join the team.
- Completed a housing survey and found a great need for apartments and duplex units.



Gray/Jones County rehabbing

Thomson/McDuffie County

The Thomson/McDuffie County GICH team continues to address neighborhoods in decline and has focused on the Pitt Street Area. Selected activities include:

- Continued CDBG and CHIP funded activities: rehabilitation, reconstruction, and infrastructure improvements in the Pitt Street area. The City received awards for CDBG funds in 2009-2011. Applications will be made for the remaining improvement projects estimated at \$500,000 to \$800,000. Made improvements to the Pitt Street Park through SPLOST funds.
- Partnering with the CSRA Regional Commission, the 2005 Urban Redevelopment Plan is being updated with the following objectives: consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, clearly defined boundaries, explanation of negative conditions and finding of necessity, land-use objectives, demolition/rehabilitation, infrastructure Improvements, and implementation Plan.
- Identified Sills Branch as the next target area after completion of Pitt Street improvements. This effort will include a partnership with the Housing Authority for both private and public renewal in housing and infrastructure.
- Hired a new City Code Enforcement officer to enforce all building and “clean community” codes.
- Commencing in 2006, Thomson and McDuffie County have rehabilitated or reconstructed 47 houses in the target areas of Pitts Street and Strawberry Hills. Infrastructure improvements were made in these areas with an investment of \$2,000,000 in grants and local match. During the same time period, an estimated 50 dilapidated residential and commercial structures were demolished.
- Following graduation from GICH, the housing team will transition into the Urban Redevelopment Advisory Committee.



Housing rehabilitation

Winder

The Winder GICH team continues to building new partnerships to improve housing in Winder. With a focus on housing rehabilitation, Project Winder has grown tremendously since the beginning of the program and now serves the whole County. Selected activities include:

- Project Winder is a community involvement program, and headed by local churches, provides mission work done locally. Organized by River Hills Church, UMC Winder, UMC Bethlehem, FBC Winder, FBC Bethlehem, Habitat for humanity, and 7 other churches; this housing rehabilitation program is now called Project Barrow.
- Rehabbed homes of 23 elderly homeowners and others in need. This included 40 workers, 30 support people, and local business support. Students were housed at Winder Barrow High

School with meals and worship available at First Christian. The program received corporate sponsorships and was followed and promoted on local TV.

- Planned for the continuation of Project Barrow. Homes in neighborhoods of previous projects have been better maintained and upgraded by both homeowners and landlords.
- Continued seeking support for the Urban Redevelopment Plan. GICH team members made presentations to City Council.
- Continued successful code enforcement efforts. Started Streetscape; revised and enforced sign ordinance; and reserved funds for 4 or 5 demolitions.
- Removed the Granite Hotel, a dilapidated building downtown. Historic granite was saved for accent elements in a new downtown park that will occupy that site.
- Welcomed the newly hired Downtown Development Authority Director to the GICH team.
- Continued to provide home buyer workshops through the Winder Housing Authority resulting in 3 new homeowners. Enrolled 8 households in GED/Work Ready programs and through vocational rehabilitation, 9 people are back into the workforce.
- Developers received Low-income Housing Tax Credits to build Farmington Hills II with 72 units and Braselton Court with 80 units.



Community volunteers

The Initiative's Ninth Year: Looking Ahead to Progress

In November 2012, GICH selected five very qualified communities: Dalton, Greensboro, Lithonia, Pembroke, and Roswell. Joining the other 10 participating communities, these cities will convene for two retreats in 2013 in Cordele (February) and in Rome (September). As always, communities continue to receive technical assistance in the intervening months to ensure forward progress on designing and implementing their housing plans.

Lithonia and Roswell are the first Atlanta metropolitan communities to be admitted to the program. This shows the increasing and broadening appeal of the program and affords new opportunities and challenges for networking and planning. In addition, the City of Dalton, a 2008 graduate of GICH, reapplied to participate for another 3 years and to take advantage of new opportunities with additional stakeholders and key players.



Georgia Initiative for Community Housing

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Georgia Initiative for Community Housing

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